



May 12th, 2025

EMAILED

Honourable Mike Farnworth
Minister of Transportation and Transit
Government of British Columbia
Minister.Transportation@gov.bc.ca

Re: Urgent Request for Increased Public Transportation Funding in Chilliwack

Dear Mike Farnworth,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Education for School District No. 33 (Chilliwack) to express our concern over the growing transportation challenges facing the students and families we serve. Chilliwack has rapidly evolved into one of Canada's fastest-growing communities, and our current transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with the region's expanding needs. This gap jeopardizes students' access to regular attendance, increases the financial strain on families, and places a significant burden on the district's already limited resources. This letter is endorsed by numerous community partner groups who share our deep concern for the educational equity and accessibility challenges faced by our students and families.

As one of our province's most vibrant and diverse school districts, we pride ourselves on providing safe and inclusive education for every student. However, the lack of robust public transit services in many areas of Chilliwack creates substantial barriers for students who rely on public transportation to get to school. While the City of Chilliwack continues to collaborate closely with our District to find local solutions, the current level of provincial funding is simply not enough to meet the demands of our growing population. We respectfully urge the provincial government to address these challenges by increasing targeted funding for public transportation in Chilliwack and the surrounding region.

The recently completed Transportation Future Action Plan for Chilliwack and the Fraser Valley Regional District highlights numerous service gaps that particularly impact school-aged children and their families. The BC Transit "Free Transit 12 and Under" program, while well-intentioned, remains inaccessible to many Chilliwack families due to limited route coverage in school neighborhoods and inadequate service during school start and dismissal times.

From a policy standpoint, this reality runs counter to our district's commitment to educational equity. According to Board Policy 310: Student Expectations, Rights, and Responsibilities, we strive to ensure every student attends school regularly and is supported in doing so. In order to truly uphold these expectations, the district must offer barrier-free transportation options. Yet the most essential resource, reliable transportation, remains a gap that must be addressed to fully realize our commitment to accessible education.

Beyond policy considerations, our district's budget is also stretched thin. Despite spending more than what is allocated by the Ministry specifically for student transportation, we struggle to keep up with demand. Resources that could enhance programming are instead redirected to cover transportation shortfalls.

Considering these challenges, we respectfully ask for enhanced provincial funding focused on:

1. **Prioritizing Expanded Services:** BC Transit expanding route coverage and frequency in Chilliwack, with particular attention to school access routes, and new transit routes in under-served neighborhoods.
2. **Investing in Infrastructure:** purchasing additional buses, improving transit shelters, and school-focused transit route development.
3. **Support for Families:** providing or maintaining low-cost or free fare options that are practical and accessible, reducing the burden on families who otherwise struggle with transportation costs.

The Chilliwack School District remains committed to collaborating with all levels of government and community partners to address these critical issues. We work closely with the City of Chilliwack and BC Transit on local solutions, but without significant provincial intervention, the fundamental barriers to equitable education will persist.

In closing, every day that passes without adequate transportation funding is another day many of our students face preventable challenges in accessing the education they deserve. We urge you to recognize the urgency of this matter and look forward to working together toward sustainable, meaningful solutions for the Chilliwack community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals in greater detail and to explore any further avenues for collaboration.

Sincerely,



Board Chair
School District No. 33 (Chilliwack)

cc:

Heather Maahs, MLA Chilliwack North,
A'aliya Warbus, MLA Chilliwack-Cultus Lake
Mayor and Council, City of Chilliwack
Minister of Education and Child Care
Minister of Infrastructure
BC Transit Board of Directors
BC School Trustees Association

Enclosures:

1. Letter from Chilliwack Teachers Association (CTA)
2. Letter from District Parents' Advisory Council (DPAC)
3. Letter from Chilliwack Principals' and Vice Principals' Association (CPVPA)



Honourable Mike Farnworth

Minister of Transportation and Transit
Government of British Columbia
minister.Transportation@gov.bc.ca

RE: Public Transportation Advocacy for Chilliwack Students and Families

Dear Minister Farnworth,

On behalf of the Chilliwack Teachers' Association, representing over 900 educators in the Chilliwack School District, I write to express our strong support for the Board of Education's call for increased public transportation investment in our community.

Access to reliable, affordable public transit is not a peripheral issue—it is fundamental to educational equity. In March 2025, the CTA conducted a comprehensive survey of our members to better understand the effects of Chilliwack's limited transit system on students, families, and staff. The results were compelling and deeply concerning:

- Over 90% of respondents agreed that better public transit would contribute to a more equitable and inclusive school environment.
- More than half of educators reported witnessing students struggling to attend school due to transportation barriers - particularly those from low-income households, single-parent families, or rural areas with little or no transit service.
- Teachers shared firsthand accounts of students arriving late, missing school entirely, or being forced to leave early in order to catch infrequent buses. Many are unable to participate in after-school sports, clubs, tutoring, or community programs, simply because they cannot get home afterward.
- Some families, including those without access to vehicles or experiencing health challenges, rely on walking long distances with young children, even in poor weather, just to reach school. Others must make difficult choices between attending school and accessing employment or child care.
- Several teachers also noted that the strain on district-operated school buses—which are increasingly used to fill the public transit gap - has begun to limit field trip opportunities, inter-school programming, and student access to specialized sites such as trades programs.

While only 9% of our members currently use public transit to commute, nearly 60% said they would consider it if services were more accessible and reliable—highlighting the potential for broader community benefit and reduced traffic congestion.

Simply put, students cannot thrive if they cannot get to school. Public transportation should not be a barrier to education. It should be a bridge.

We therefore urge the Ministry of Transportation and Transit to commit to increased investment in Chilliwack's public transit infrastructure. Expanded service coverage, frequency, and affordability would meaningfully improve access to education, participation in the broader community, and long-term outcomes for thousands of students and families.

Thank you for considering the voices of Chilliwack's educators. We hope this evidence-based perspective helps inform a transportation strategy that supports equity, dignity, and opportunity for all.

Reid Clark
President

cc Heather Maahs, MLA Chilliwack North
Á'a:liya Warbus, MLA Chilliwack-Cultus Lake
Mayor and Council, City of Chilliwack
Minister of Education and Child Care
Minister of Infrastructure
BC Transit Board of Directors
BC School Trustees Association



January 25th, 2023

City of Chilliwack
8550 Young Road Chilliwack, BC V2P 8A4

Subject: Urgent Appeal for Improved Bussing Infrastructure to Support Student Transportation

Dear Mayor Ken Popove,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to you on behalf of the Chilliwack District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), representing the collective voice of parents within our community. Our organization is deeply invested in the well-being and educational success of our children.

We would like to draw your attention to a matter of pressing concern—the need for enhanced bussing infrastructure in Chilliwack to ensure that students can access schools safely and efficiently. As you are undoubtedly aware, the landscape of our city is evolving, and the demand for reliable and accessible public transportation has become more critical than ever. Due to the city's development in size and layout, the Chilliwack School District's transportation budget is one of the highest in BC. Because of the lack of infrastructure support within the city of Chilliwack additional strains are put on the students and families.

Our primary concerns are as follows:

- **Limited Accessibility:** Many students, particularly those residing in outlying areas, face challenges in accessing public transportation. This limitation hampers their ability to attend school regularly and participate in extracurricular activities.
- **Safety Concerns:** In the absence of comprehensive bus coverage, some students are compelled to use alternative, less secure modes of transportation, which poses safety risks. Ensuring that our children have a safe and reliable means of commuting to and from school is paramount.
- **Educational Equity:** Disparities in transportation options can contribute to educational inequalities. Students without convenient access to reliable transportation may face obstacles in fully participating in the educational opportunities available to them. The strain on families to drive students contributes to financial inequity as well.

We recognize the budgetary constraints and logistical challenges that the City of Chilliwack may face. However, we firmly believe that investing in an improved bussing infrastructure is an investment in the future of our community. Therefore, we urge the City to consider the following actions:



- **Comprehensive Route Review:** Assess the current bus routes to identify gaps in coverage, with a particular focus on areas with high concentrations of students.
- **Collaboration with the Chilliwack School District:** Work closely with school district administrators to synchronize bus schedules with school hours, ensuring that transportation aligns seamlessly with the academic day.
- **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Seek input from parents, students, and educational professionals to gather valuable insights that can inform decisions on bussing infrastructure improvements.
- **Exploration of Funding Opportunities:** Investigate potential funding sources and grants that could be used to enhance bussing services for students and continued advocacy to the Ministry of Transportation for financial support in this matter.

The Chilliwack Parent Advisory Council is ready and willing to collaborate with the City in addressing these concerns. We believe that by working together, we can create a transportation system that meets the needs of all students, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to seeing positive developments in our city's bussing infrastructure. Thank you for your dedication to the welfare of our community's youth.

Sincerely,

The signature of Katie Bartel, written in a cursive script. To the left of the signature is the Chilliwack District Parent Advisory Council logo, which is a smaller version of the logo described above.

Katie Bartel
DPAC Chair

Chilliwack District Parent Advisory Council

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the Chilliwack Principals' and Vice Principals' Association, we are writing to express our strong support for expanded public transportation services in Chilliwack. As school leaders, we are deeply concerned about the impact that limited transit options have on student attendance and access to education.

Absenteeism is at a crisis level in schools across the province, and in our city, transportation challenges are a significant contributing factor. Many students rely on school buses as their primary mode of transportation, but when they miss the bus, there are often no viable public transit alternatives to get them to school on time - or at all. This lack of options disproportionately affects our most vulnerable students, including those from low-income families, students with disabilities, and those who live in areas with limited transit coverage.

In a recent survey of principals and vice-principals across our district, the majority of respondents estimated that between 11% and 70% of student absenteeism can be attributed to transportation barriers. Several noted that the degree of impact depends significantly on where students live and the availability of transit routes in those areas. Perhaps even more concerning, the survey also revealed that a number of principals and school-based staff are regularly required to leave their schools during the day to transport students who cannot otherwise get to school. This not only disrupts daily school operations but underscores how urgent and widespread the transportation gap has become.

To ensure all students have equitable access to education, we urge decision-makers to prioritize the following improvements:

- **Increased Bus Routes and Coverage** – More transit routes, particularly in high-need areas, would ensure students who miss their school bus or have other transportation barriers can still reach school.

- **More Frequent Service** – Greater frequency of buses, especially during peak school hours, would help reduce wait times and make public transit a more reliable option for students.
- **Student-Friendly Scheduling** – Aligning transit schedules more closely with school start and dismissal times would allow more students to use public transportation as a backup when necessary.

As school leaders, we see firsthand how transportation barriers impact student learning and well-being. Expanding public transit in Chilliwack is not only an investment in infrastructure but also in the future of our students and the broader community. We urge you to consider these concerns and work towards solutions that will better support our young people in accessing their education.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further and collaborate on strategies to improve student transportation options. Thank you for your time and commitment to this important matter.

Sincerely,

The Chilliwack Principals' and Vice Principals' Association